January 7, 2000

A strong cold front moved across SW Florida on December 24th dropping nighttime temperatures to the mid to upper 30’s and lower 40’s and daytime temperatures into the 60’s and 70’s to close out the year. Although a low of 36.1 was recorded at the FAWN Weather Station in Immokalee, no frost was reported in our area.

Over the past week, temperatures have been unseasonably warm with highs reaching the lower 80’s and lows in the mid-50’s. The passage of several fronts across the region has bought some precipitation as well as foggy conditions and heavy dew on several mornings. Heavy late night and morning fogs are conducive to the development of late blight as well as other diseases and growers are advised to monitor this situation closely as warranted by weather conditions.

Total precipitation has been generally low in most areas. The FAWN Weather Station in Immokalee recorded a total of 1.0 inch for the period. Growers in most areas of SW Florida have reported similar amounts, although coastal areas in Lee and Collier Counties have seen up to 3 inches for the period.

Below average rainfall since early November, has lead to lower than usual ground water levels in several areas and some growers are concerned that we may see conditions similar to last year develop later in the season. Many may remember problems stemming from the accumulation of high levels of soluble salts in planting beds and difficulty in maintaining adequate soil moisture as temperatures increased in the spring.

The five-day forecast calls for mild weather conditions for the next several days. There is a possibility of showers today and the likelihood of foggy conditions on Saturday.

Harvest of most crops is in full swing at this time with beans, cucumbers, eggplants, melons, peppers, pickles, squash, sweet corn and tomatoes now moving to market. Crops are looking good for the most part. Insect and disease pressure remains relatively light.

Leafminers remain widely present at medium to high levels across the area. While some respondents have noted some decrease in leafminer pressure compared to a few weeks ago, other are continuing to reports severe pressure particularly in newly set spring tomato. In addition to tomato, leafminers have been active in cucurbits.
and potato.

By all reports silver leaf whitefly populations remain extremely low. Records indicate that whitefly populations are below last year’s levels at this time.

Worms are being seen sporadically. Most growers are reporting little to no worm pressure at this time although there have been some isolated outbreaks of mainly southern armyworm in some places.

Moderate levels of winged aphids continue to be seen across the area. Populations appear to be higher than they have been in the past few years and numbers are reportedly fluctuating around moderate levels. Populations are reportedly building in several crops including pepper, potato and squash. Aphids have been contributing to the appearance of virus problems in pepper and squash.

Broad mites are still around on pepper and eggplant in widely scattered locations and there are continuing reports of persistent flare-ups here and there.

Several growers are reporting problems with spider mites on eggplant. Occurrence is sporadic but damage has been moderate to high in some cases.

Bacterial leaf spot remains widely present in tomato and pepper. Pressure has been relatively low although several growers have noted observing pockets of increased bacterial leaf spot activity especially after wet or foggy weather.

The incidence of tomato yellow leaf curl remains low. Most growers are seeing only isolated occurrences of single infected plants here and there.

Several days of misty rain and foggy conditions over the past few weeks have lead a moderate increase in the number of foliar diseases being observed in tomato. Several respondents have noted increased pressure from early blight, gray leaf spot and target spot. Incidence and damage is mostly low.

Two cases of gray wall on tomato have been reported around Immokalee. Cold weather in late December is presumably a contributing factor.

Downy mildew as well as powdery mildew is being reported primarily on squash and cucumber from several locations. Angular leaf spot and alternaria leaf blight is also being reported in cucurbits. Incidence is low to moderate and crop damage varies accordingly.

Several reports indicate that fusarium crown rot is cranking up on tomato. Damage is reportedly severe in some fields where the disease has traditionally been a problem. Fusarium wilt has also been noted in potato particularly later plantings made in cool soils. Incidence is low.

Phytophthora and fusarium crown rot is causing some losses in pepper in a few locations particularly in planting that where affected by heavy rains earlier in the season.

Powdery mildew has been reported in beans. Incidence is low and occurrence sporadic.

Early blight and leaf spot is showing up in potato in scattered locations. Incidence is generally low and damage minimal.

A number of viruses have been detected in pepper including potato virus Y, potyvirus and tobacco etch virus. These may be spread from older plantings and nearby Solanaceous weed hosts, such as nightshade,
horse nettle and ground cherry by aphids. Use of insecticides to control aphids and use of JMS stylet oil to prevent transmission of virus is recommended.

Given the fact that the early tomato crop is nearly finished, growers are again reminded of the importance of sanitation and prompt destruction of crop residues in an IPM program.

The prompt destruction of a crop at the end of the season will immediately end the production of disease inoculum and insects and eliminate the spread of diseases and pests to any other host plants in the vicinity. Plowing or diskimg under infected plant debris helps not only by covering up the inoculum but also speeds up the disintegration of plant tissue and kills the pathogen. Field sanitation will be come an increasingly important tool to growers in face of the impending loss of methyl bromide – whose ease of use and effectiveness in controlling a wide range of problems allowed us to neglect some of these practical common sense pest management techniques.

Websites:

SPRAY TIPS – is a free electronic newsletter that provides useful and timely tip on sprayers, spraying, and sprayer technology. It is published biweekly by Bill Hunt of Bill Hunt Company. You can check out Spray Tips at http://www.spraytec.com/ST_FeatureArticles.asp or you can subscribe to Spray Tips by emailing tips@spraytec.com and putting subscribe as the subject.

Organic Materials Review Institute – organic growers and others can access OMRI’s brand name and generic product lists as well as technical reviews regarding the acceptability or unacceptability of products used in organic production. OMRI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created to benefit the organic community and the general public. Its primary mission is to publish and disseminate generic and specific (brand name) lists of materials allowed and prohibited for use in the production, processing, and handling of organic food and fiber. OMRI also conducts scientific research and education on the use of materials by the organic industry. Visit the OMRI web site at http://www.omri.org

UF/IFAS SW Florida Research and Education Center (SWFREC) in Immokalee – everything you ever wanted to know about SWFREC. Check it out at http://www.imok.ufl.edu/

SWFREC Station Reports - looking for research information from Immokalee? A number of station reports are available on the web.

Dr. Charlie Vavrina has placed many of his station reports covering his work on biologicals, bio-stimulants, fertilizers and other horticultural topics online. For the complete list of his reports go to http://www.imok.ufl.edu/veghort/pubs/sta_rpts/sta_rpts.htm

Dr Phil Stansly has also posted a number of station reports on various pest control topics and pesticide trials. They can be seen at http://www.imok.ufl.edu/entlab/pubs/sta_rpts/sta_rpts.htm

FAWN Weather Station – the Florida Automated Weather Network, where you will find real-time agricultural weather information collected from automated weather stations distributed throughout Florida. You can access weather archives for the past days, weeks, months or other time periods from Immokalee and 19 other sites through out the state http://www.imok.ufl.edu/weather/

Vegetable Budgets – The South Florida Extension Leadership in Vegetables Working Group has collected a number of vegetable crop budgets from various sources. They can be accessed at http://www.imok.ufl.edu/veghort/SFELV/groups/economic/budglks.htm.

Websites:
**Dr Tom Kucharek** - Plant Pathologist at UF/IFAS reports that the new Plant Protection Pointer No. 6 – Chemical Control Guide for Diseases of Vegetables (Revision 12) and Plant Protection Pointer No. 15 – Disease Control Program for Watermelons (Revision 16) can be found on the Plant Pathology home page at [http://plantpath.ifas.ufl.edu](http://plantpath.ifas.ufl.edu).

**OutLook 2000 – Vegetables** - John Van Sickle UF/IFAS reports that this season promises to be another year of uncertainty for Florida growers. The fall harvest was met with excess supplies as production again increased throughout the fall, even though acreage in Florida declined 5 percent from the previous year. Increased demand, both in domestic and foreign markets, has not been enough to offset increases in supply from both domestic and foreign suppliers. California producers bought lower returns into the fall season as their 1999 acreage increased more than 5 percent from the previous year. Their fall tomato acreage increased more than 21 percent to cause even greater impacts on the fall tomato crop. Imports of several fresh vegetables also increased this fall to compound marketing problems. Imports of fresh tomatoes increased by nearly 12 percent this past fall while cucumber imports increased 20 percent.

One bright spot for the Florida industry is continued growth in demand for the products grown by our growers. Increased consumption of food away from home increase the demand for products that Florida growers produce. These trends will continue to favor Florida producers.

The excess supplies coming into the winter market cloud the short-term outlook for fresh vegetables. Weather and foreign trade will be the driving forces in this market. Favorable growing conditions will likely lead to increases in supply that the market is currently not equipped to handle. Predict this winter’s weather in Florida and Mexico and you will likely predict the outcome of the season for Florida growers.

**SW Florida Vegetable Research Investment Fund Launched**

Vegetable farming has never been an easy proposition and in recent years survival in this dynamic environment has not been easy. The Southwest Florida Vegetable Advisory Committee has been pondering this situation for the past few months and has considered ways to alleviate the plight of area growers and help shift the competitive balance in their favor.

With this goal in mind, the committee has decided to launch the “SW Florida Vegetable Research Investment Fund.” The fund is envisioned as a strategic partnership of growers and others in the vegetable industry who come together to pool their resources to address research needs of common concern.

The SW Florida Vegetable Research Investment Fund is set up to be managed by the contributor-members who will prioritize and fund research projects through a democratically elected advisory committee. Membership will be based on contributions of one dollar per cropped acre per year or flat fee for non-growers. Growers will hold the purse strings and will be free to choose from public or private research groups and hold researchers accountable for performance. An organizational meeting will be held in Immokalee in January - February 2000. Details will be forthcoming soon.

You are strongly urged to consider this proposal favorably. Government support for agricultural research is waning and often devoted to projects of little immediate importance to commercial growers. By participating in the SW Florida Vegetable Research Investment Fund, you will be helping to ensure the future of practical research that addresses the needs of local vegetable growers will be supported. The strength and ultimately the future survival of not only the vegetable industry in southwest Florida but also every vegetable grower will depend on cooperation and unity within the industry.

**Upcoming Meetings**
January 13, 2000  CANCELED  - Growers Meeting - Research into KeyPlex DP - CANCELED

January 25, 2000  WPS –Train the Trainer - 8:30 AM - Noon
Dallas B Townsend Agricultural Center, LaBelle
Contact: Gene McAvoy or Sheila Griffith at 941-674-4092

March 6, 2000  2000 POST HARVEST INSTITUTE - This year’s topic is “Innovations in Fresh Produce Transportation” – the conference will be held at the University of Florida in Gainesville as well as the Tropical Research & Education Center (Homestead), Southwest Florida Research & Education Center (Immokalee) and Indian River Research & Education Center (Ft. Pierce) via live, video-conferencing. For more information, contact Ms. Abbie Fox, at 352-392-1928, ext. 235 or Gene McAvoy at 941-674-4092 for information about the Immokalee site.

Contributors include: Karen Armbrester/SWFREC, Jim Connor/SWFREC, Bruce Corbitt/West Coast Tomato Growers, Marty Gross/SWFREC, David Harlof/Pacific Tomato Growers, Fred Heald/Farmers Supply, Sarah Hornsby/AgCropCon, Cecil Howell/H&R Farm, Leon Lucas/Glades Crop Care, Gene McAvoy/Hendry County Extension, Alice McGhee/Thomas Produce, Andy Nychk/Nychk Bros. Farm, Chuck Obern/C+B Farm, Dr. Pam Roberts/SWFREC, Wes Roan/6 L’s, Kevin Seitzinger/Gargiulo, Jay Shivler/ F& F Farm, Mike Stanford/MED Farms, Dr. Phil Stansly/SWFREC, Eugene Tolar/Red Star Farms, and Dr. Charlie Vavrina/SWFREC.

The SW Florida Pest and Disease Hotline is compiled by Gene McAvoy and is issued on a biweekly basis by the Hendry County Cooperative Extension Office as a service to the vegetable industry.

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